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The Life and Work of Howard Zinn

A Study in Radical American History¹

Ambre Ivöl

- 1 In May 2003, « a publishing milestone » was celebrated in New York City, the sale of one million copies of *A People's History of the United States* by radical historian Howard Zinn. The popularity of this book can be measured in various ways². The book has served as an inspiration to various American artists, such as film director and actor Tim Robbins, rock star Bruce Springsteen, lead singer Eddy Vedder from the band Pearl Jam and folksinger Ani DiFranco³. Zinn's treatment of Christopher Columbus is so famous that in an episode of *The Sopranos*, son A. J. is holding a copy of *A People's History* during an argument with his father about whether the man the father Tony calls « a brave Italian explorer » was really a hero. Another open reference to the book can be found in the Oscar-winning script of *Good Will Hunting*⁴.
- 2 Though largely ignored by the historical profession when it came out in 1980, *A People's History* slowly made it into mainstream academia. Judging by the enthusiasm of high school and college teachers and students who wrote to Zinn over the last two decades, it seems that the book overcame its marginality to become unavoidable as a textbook reference⁵. Zinn's book is now seen as a « counter-textbook » to mainstream history⁶. Zinn belongs to a generation of scholars who experienced the momentous social upheavals of the 1960s : « As a result of these changes, American life was reordered and new modes of intellectual inquiry were promoted »⁷. Revisionist scholars began to take into account the lives of ordinary people, thus broadening the range of human experience recorded by history. They also experimented with « new interpretive paradigms »⁸. A path-breaking awareness of the ways race, class, gender and sexuality have shaped the lives of Americans ensued. Zinn can be seen as a spokesperson for this generation of new historians who adopted a historical perspective « from the bottom up »⁹. Indeed, when *A People's History* first came out in 1980, historian Eric Foner spoke of the book as « a step toward a coherent new version of American history »¹⁰.
- 3 Zinn emerged as a scholar-activist through his involvement in the southern Civil Rights movement in the early 1960s. He became a figure of the New Left as an adult advisor to

SNCC¹¹ and later as a member of the Radical Caucus in the American Historians Association¹² engaged in the movement against the Vietnam War, together with historians such as Jesse Lemisch and Staughton Lynd¹³. By the end of the 1970s, he had risen to national prominence. The publication of his *People's History* strengthened his position as a radical historian. The next two decades would consolidate his identity as a public figure. In the 1990s, he would appear on national public television on issues of foreign policy, most notably the first Gulf war of 1992 and the bombing of Serbia in 1998¹⁴.

- 4 But as the millennium drew to a close, the political landscape changed, as the « global justice movements »¹⁵ grew, and as 9/11 and the subsequent « war on terrorism » generated a new antiwar movement¹⁶. A critic of American foreign policy in the tradition of revisionist historian William Appleman Williams, Zinn has made war the backbone of his identity as a scholar-activist. He regularly engages in public debates about the causes and the consequences of modern warfare on campuses, in churches, and in local communities throughout the United States and abroad¹⁷. Along with popular figures such as foreign policy critic Noam Chomsky, novelist Gore Vidal, independent journalist Amy Goodman and Canadian political essayist Naomi Klein, Zinn's influence points to a sizeable audience for radical ideas on the Left in the United States.
- 5 However, Zinn stands out as a generational oddity. Indeed, born in 1922 and a fellow traveler of the American Communist Party in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Zinn seems to have shed the identity of the « Old Left »¹⁸ and has become identified with the New Left of the 1960s¹⁹. Moreover, though now 85 years old, Zinn has become an influential figure of the new social movements of the 21st century, especially dealing with issues of the « war on terrorism ». How is one to account for this surprising influence ?
- 6 Actually, Zinn's prominent role as a « public intellectual » comes precisely from this sense of historical continuity embodied by his personal story²⁰. We shall first see how this generational oddity serves as a touchstone for the emergence of new forms of political radicalism in the United States. Then we will look at how Zinn used his own life as raw material for his work as a historian. Finally, we will show how he has served as a bridge among periods of resistance in both his life and work. Indeed, it is precisely because Zinn embodies a sense of historical continuity that he remains to this day among the oldest and most popular public intellectuals in the United States.
- 7 French historian Michel Winock argues that a new generation can be defined through the combined influence of two trends : the coming of age of a new generational cohort and the impact of an unprecedented historical event or series of events²¹. Applying this framework to the present context, one could follow sociologist Charles Derber's view that the new millennium opened with two new national circumstances²². One was the emergence of new « global justice movements » and the other was the terrorist attacks on 9/11²³. The late 1990s saw the rise of new networks of alternative media, with New York-based show *Democracy Now!* a key representative of that trend when it was first aired in 1996²⁴. What would come to be called the « global justice movements »²⁵ were gathering momentum, leading to their first public expression in the US with the massive demonstrations against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in December 1999. Canadian journalist Naomi Klein published what would become one of the leading political statements of the movement in 2000 under the title *No Space, No work, No Jobs, No Logo : Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*.²⁶ This work was inspired by student activism in the late 1990s that was changing in its nature, from more parochial, single-issue, identity-based politics to a broader perspective connecting issues to the global economy. The book

itself came out of a new wave of student activism around demands for a living wage for Harvard University workers²⁷. Hence, the « global justice movements » gave rise to a new generation of social activists.

- 8 Zinn saw the Seattle demonstrations as a turning point, a qualitative change in the type of social movements occurring in the country after the end of the long decade of the 1960s :

In Seattle, the demonstrators were grappling with impossibly complex economic issues—globalization, protectionism, [and] export trade (...) It was a turning point in the history of the movements of recent decades—a departure from the single issue focus of (...) the nuclear freeze rally in Central Park in 1982 (...) the gatherings for the Equal Rights Amendment in 1978, for lesbian and gay rights in 1993, for the Million Man March in 1995 (...) This time the union movement was at the centre. The issue of class—rich and poor, here and all over the globe—bound everyone together²⁸.

- 9 According to Zinn, the Seattle events participated in the redefinition of the political landscape in the country. When Green Party candidate Ralph Nader ran for president in 2000, Zinn supported his campaign actively. Among other events, on September 29, 2000, Howard Zinn, film director Michael Moore and Green Party vice-presidential nominee Winona LaDuke shared a platform in Boston in support of the Nader candidacy²⁹. But the tragedy of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 momentarily brought the wave of international demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization to a halt. The « War on terrorism » took centre stage. However the country did not remain united over the means and ends of the « war on terrorism ». In the spring of 2002, over 60,000 American public intellectuals, artists and ordinary citizens signed a « statement of conscience » opposing the « war on terrorism ». Howard Zinn, along with Gore Vidal, Noam Chomsky and African-American public intellectuals Angela Davis and Cornel West, was among the endorsers of the appeal³⁰. The pre-emptive strikes on Iraq in March 2003 further fuelled opposition to the Bush administration. The unprecedented movement against the invasion of Iraq became the biggest international campaign since the movement against the war in Vietnam³¹. In the United States, this was true as well³². Zinn emerged as a national public speaker against the war in Iraq³³. He has been invited on public radio and television shows, such as the *Ron Stewart Daily Show* in January 2005³⁴.

- 10 His international popularity has also grown. A few years ago, French independent publishing company Agone took interest in a number of American radical intellectuals³⁵. Agone published French versions of *A People's History of the United States*, *Marx in Soho : a Play on History* and *Emma : a Play in Two Acts About Emma Goldman, American Anarchist*³⁶. In May 2003, Zinn spoke in Paris on the subject of « Just and Unjust wars »³⁷. Furthermore, on December 1, 2003, Zinn received a special prize from the independent monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*, emphasizing the value of *A People's History* as a scholarly work standing against « la pensée unique »³⁸. Finally, a national public radio show was devoted to Zinn's historical approach³⁹. A new interest in the « Other America », understood as networks of resistance to the Bush administration seemed to have taken hold in France⁴⁰.
- 11 In the United States, the crisis continued to deepen, with a combination of unprecedented protests against the war in the summer of 2004⁴¹. Rallies and demonstrations took place throughout the country, and Zinn spoke at many events in Boston, supporting the « Anybody But Bush » campaign⁴², but adding that in « safe states », as in his home state of Massachusetts, people should vote for independent candidate Ralph Nader⁴³. A peak in

political tension came during the Republican Convention in New York with a demonstration of about 500,000 people⁴⁴. The presence of Iraq veterans, military families and families of 9/11 victims made for a qualitative change in this demonstration which was also unprecedented in its numbers⁴⁵. Moreover, compared to the movement against the war in Vietnam, the level of protest had been much higher, and had started even before the bombing of Iraq⁴⁶.

- 12 In addition, the unprecedented level of social unrest has led to changes inside the American historical profession itself. A caucus called Historians Against the War was created on September 21, 2003 and has gained members over the years⁴⁷. HAW has held public meetings on the history of US foreign policy over the last four years and has appeared as a specific contingent during antiwar demonstrations. Moreover, at the annual convention of the American Historical Association in Atlanta in 2007, an antiwar resolution was passed on « Government Practices Inimical to the Values of the Historical Profession ». This resolution echoed the controversies inside the profession during the Vietnam War. But in 1969, the antiwar resolution had been voted down. At the time, the Radical Historians Caucus was led by, among others, Staughton Lynd, Howard Zinn and Jesse Lemisch. Marxist historian Eugene Genovese opposed the caucus, insisting that the profession should remain neutral and devoted to detached scholarship⁴⁸.
- 13 Today, the radical HAW seems to have been more easily accepted by the historical profession, thus indicating a change in the political atmosphere⁴⁹. Radical history as a whole has gained relevance inside the academia. The Organization of American Historians recently paid tribute to Zinn's work at a town meeting in Boston for the opening of its annual convention in 2004⁵⁰. Similarly, Staughton Lynd was a keynote speaker at the 2007 AHA annual convention⁵¹. In the latter case, the purpose was to rehabilitate a professional historian whose career had been destroyed following a trip to North Vietnam in 1969⁵². More generally, a new interest for radical history can be found with publications such as *The Radical Reader : A Documentary History of the American Radical Tradition*⁵³.
- 14 Zinn's recent work speaks directly to the present situation⁵⁴. One of his latest books is a companion volume to *A People's History*. Entitled *Voices of a People's History* (New York, Seven Stories Press, 2004) it is a collection of the primary sources quoted in *A People's History*,
Readers of *A People's History* always refer to the wealth of quoted material in it—the words of (...) dissenters and dissidents of all kinds. (...) I wanted the voices of struggle, mostly absent from our history books, to be given the place they deserve⁵⁵.
- 15 Updated to include both the « global justice movements » and the movement against the war in Iraq, it has been used as a collection of oral histories of resistance. For over two years now, actors such as Viggo Mortensen, Danny Glover and Dinah Washington, as well as late novelist Kurt Vonnegut, participated in a series of public readings from the book⁵⁶. With Zinn and Arnove alternating as narrators presenting each character, from Mark Twain denouncing the Mexican-American War of 1848, to military mother Cyndi Sheehan⁵⁷, these public readings have become part of the growing opposition to the war both influenced by, and feeding into, the movement⁵⁸.
- 16 At the start of the 21st century, Zinn has emerged as a popular, though controversial, intellectual who has managed to reach mainstream US society through some of his work, thus reflecting shifts in the political atmosphere of the country and the growth of an audience for radical ideas.

- 17 Zinn has essentially built his philosophy of history on his personal experience. In his memoirs, he claimed that his deep sense of optimism was rooted in the key experiences of his life. Writing a « political » biography, he chose to tell his story thematically rather than chronologically⁵⁹. He deals first with « the greatest days » of his life in the South during the Civil Rights movement⁶⁰, then with his opposition to the Vietnam War as « A Veteran Against the War »⁶¹ and finally expands upon the unusual circumstances of his early life leading him from a Jewish working class life to that of a tenured professor at Boston University⁶².
- 18 Compared to other historians who grew up during the Great Depression and the contemporary emergence of Stalinism and fascism, Zinn has remained surprisingly unscarred by those times, hinting perhaps at the relative invisibility of his generational roots⁶³. Indeed, together with political figures such as Ella Baker (1903-1986), Zinn was deeply transformed by the social movements of the 1960s, apparently shedding in the process much of his former generational identity.
- 19 The Civil Rights movement was the central experience of his life. In 1956, Zinn left the working class world of New York and moved to Atlanta, Georgia with his family. He was offered a position at Spelman College, a school for young African American women⁶⁴. Zinn took part in the struggles to desegregate the public facilities of the city of Atlanta. He was an observer and participant in the student movement, sitting in, desegregating the gallery of the State Legislature and picketing the State Capitol⁶⁵. Upon termination of his contract in 1963 because of his political activities, he moved to Boston (MA) where he would teach at Boston University for the next twenty years. For a while, he remained active in the southern movement, spending the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi and writing about racial violence and the role of the Federal government in enforcing change in the South⁶⁶.
- 20 The Civil Rights movement inspired Zinn's scholarly work. He wrote the very first oral history of SNCC⁶⁷. « What I am attempting to do here is to catch a glimpse of SNCC people in action and to suggest the quality of their contribution to American civilization »⁶⁸. Zinn used first-hand information and conducted his research among the archives in Atlanta and the files of the Southern Regional Council⁶⁹. *The Southern Mystique* was also based on personal experience, though it remained primarily a speculative essay challenging the idea of southern exceptionalism⁷⁰.
- 21 Zinn's involvement against the war in Vietnam was triggered by the increasing connections drawn by civil rights activists between domestic and foreign issues⁷¹. When SNCC leader Robert Parris Moses criticized the federal government for sending troops to Vietnam while failing to protect civil rights workers in Mississippi, Zinn claims he witnessed the first stages of the build-up of the anti-war movement in the country⁷².
- 22 Soon, Boston University would become a hotspot of student unrest⁷³. His personal involvement in demonstrations and as a supporter of draft resisters would strengthen his position as a public intellectual against the war⁷⁴.
- 23 Calling for immediate military withdrawal in a controversial book dedicated « To the People of Vietnam », Zinn tried to demonstrate how withdrawal was the only viable solution for both the United States and Vietnam⁷⁵. The book became both popular and controversial in many regional newspapers across the United States. It was also sent to Congressmen and was sold at antiwar events as a pamphlet⁷⁶. Profoundly shocked by the destruction he saw in Vietnam during a trip in 1967 with Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan as

representatives of the American peace movement, he was led to explore the inherent contradiction of the concept of a « just war » because of the inevitably high level of civilian casualties⁷⁷. This would lead him to revisit his involvement as a bombardier in World War Two⁷⁸. He would come to question the objectives of one of his bombing missions over the French town of Royan, a mission later proven to be uncalled for⁷⁹. In 1966, he would conduct specific research about the diplomatic and military situation that led to the bombing. His findings would eventually be published by the early 1970s⁸⁰.

24 The current antiwar movement has also prompted Zinn to draw upon his experience as a veteran⁸¹. Founded in the 1980s by late Vietnam veteran David Cline, Veterans for Peace played a major role in providing a sense of continuity among generations of veterans who had come to oppose the means of modern warfare. A keynote speaker at its annual convention in July 2004, Zinn shared his personal experience as a WWII bombardier with young veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq, who in turn told of how they had been misled in believing the goals of the « war on terrorism »⁸². This event was representative of a growing sentiment of betrayal felt by soldiers returning from Iraq. A group called Iraq Veterans Against the War was formed in the wake of these events, modeled after the group of Vietnam Veterans from a previous generation⁸³.

25 Hence, in the new context of the « war on terrorism », Zinn's life experiences have taken on a new meaning⁸⁴. The present situation in the United States has made Zinn's generational roots more relevant. In August 2004, Zinn wrote of being invited to the World War II Memorial celebration in Washington DC organized by the Smithsonian Institution that same year,

I am here to honor all (...) who died in that war. But I am not here to honor war itself. (...) I certainly don't want our government to use the triumphal excitement surrounding World War II to cover up the horrors now taking place in Iraq⁸⁵.

26 Zinn has constantly opposed the way the symbol of the « good war »⁸⁶ has been used to justify new military interventions, such as the war in Vietnam, the first Gulf War in 1991, the bombing of Serbia in 1999, and the bombing of Afghanistan and Iraq. For over fifty years, war has remained the backbone of his work, thus reflecting the way his personal story directly impacted his philosophy of history. Actually, in life and work, Zinn's trajectory bridges generational gaps between periods of resistance, thus making him a living embodiment of radical history.

27 Zinn's biographical and political trajectory could illustrate a trend of continuity among generations of political activists on the left. He was a union organizer in the early 1940s as he worked in the Brooklyn Navy yards. At the time, he was a fellow traveler of the CP USA, though he remained skeptical about the Soviet Union's foreign policy⁸⁷. The war and its aftermath would deepen his political involvement, as it would for a whole generation of veterans⁸⁸. Studs Terkel recorded this trend in his collection of interviews entitled *The 'Good War'*⁸⁹. The high level of politicization of the generation of young people who benefited from the GI Bill by 1949 has been noted by many historians⁹⁰.

28 This contrasts with the general political atmosphere which shifted to the Second Red Scare with its record of political repression and intimidation as the Cold War with the Soviet Union set in⁹¹.

29 But Zinn was not weakened or demoralized as many others from the « Old Left » generation were. Indeed, according to Vivian Gornick, a large proportion of those who had joined the party following the Great Depression had left by the late 1950s, under the combined pressure of political repression at home and disillusionment with the Soviet

model after the official recognition of Stalin's crimes at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956⁹². This was not so with Zinn, as he had shed any illusions about the democratic credentials of the Soviet Union by the end of the war⁹³. But he continued to participate in political movements on the Left such as the American Labor Party⁹⁴. He also joined the American Veterans Committee and became head of the Brooklyn chapter in New York City during the late 1940s⁹⁵. This chapter was among the most radical in the country and called itself the « Gung Ho » chapter, taking its political inspiration from the Chinese revolution of 1949⁹⁶. But by the early 1950s, the tensions of the Cold War led to the collapse of the AVC. Moreover, the intimidations of the F.B.I. forced Zinn to adopt a low political profile. Visited twice by agents in 1952 and 1953 for questioning about his political activities, he and his wife decided to throw out the letters they had written to each other during the war. In them, they mentioned Communist friends whom they now feared might be harmed by the F.B.I.⁹⁷. Out of intimidation, Zinn was thus led to focus more exclusively on his studies as a doctoral student at Columbia University, as the pressure of McCarthyism rolled back some of the gains of the New Deal⁹⁸.

- 30 On the whole, Zinn was surprisingly unscarred by the Red Scare and his years of involvement with « Old Left » networks. Apart from personal political intimidation and from the direct witnessing of violence at the Peekskill riots in 1949 during a Paul Robeson show, Zinn personally benefited from the economic boom of the 1950s and the social opportunities provided by the GI Bill as he completed his doctorate in history⁹⁹. One could argue that the main reason for this came from a peculiar set of circumstances which led him to move away from the centers of power of the country and into the networks of resistance of the black community. « It did not occur to me [then that] 'negro' colleges being out of the main line of vision in American education, could be a kind of refuge for unorthodox teachers, but this was often the case »¹⁰⁰.
- 31 Indeed, he benefited from the way the black liberation movement allowed older activists to become involved in new struggles and were welcomed as radicals. In a way, those involved in the struggles of the late 1950s and early 1960s were saved from the political amnesia that swept over most of the networks of radical politics existing before World War Two. This is especially true for groups connected to the Communist Party¹⁰¹. In a crucial way the struggles of African Americans served as a bridge between the 1930s and the 1960s, overcoming, at least in part, the historical amnesia that had set in with McCarthyism and allowing those who were disillusioned with Stalinism to reinvent new ways of fighting for social change¹⁰². This is expressed by white radical activist Ann Braden who became involved in social movements at the height of the Second Red Scare : « There was only one thing which could not be suppressed, that was the burning desire of African-Americans to be free »¹⁰³.
- 32 Some historians have recently favored taking the long view on the black liberation movement from the 1930s to the 1970s¹⁰⁴. This reading of history serves to bridge generations of radical activists. Figures central to the Civil Rights movement like Rosa Parks (1913-2005), unionists A. Philip Randolph (1889-1979) and E.D. Nixon (1899-1987), Malcom X (1922-1965), pacifist Bayard Rustin (1912-1987) and Ella Baker are testimony to the continuity among political generations of radicals in the United States during and despite the atmosphere of political repression of the time. Both Zinn and Baker served as adult advisors of SNCC in its early years. Baker's influence in SNCC is now largely acknowledged, and illustrates the role of older political activists for the next generation.

Historian Barbara Ransby described her role in SNCC as a « conduit of experiences » from one generation to the next¹⁰⁵.

- 33 Parallel to this biographical bridge, Zinn's work has emphasized continuity among periods of resistance. *A People's History* is arguably his strongest work serving this purpose. Taking a long view on US history « from 1492 to the present », Zinn aimed at « disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, occasionally to win »¹⁰⁶. Although *A People's History* is regarded as a product of the new social history of the 1960s, one could argue that it serves as a larger bridge among generations of scholars on the left. Although the footnotes were left out to attract a wider readership, the bibliography is quite telling in terms of historical continuity among generations of radical scholars. Indeed Zinn notes, « This work could not have been written without the work of several generations of scholars »¹⁰⁷. Works by Communist historians Herbert Aptheker and Philip Foner published in the early 1970s but long-ignored in the historical profession are referenced with the autobiography of Big Bill Haywood and Mauritz Hallgren's *Seeds of Revolt*¹⁰⁸.
- 34 More importantly, the role Zinn assigned for himself as a « thinking » person who should « listen to the cry of the poor » in order to « know what justice is » and to avoid being « on the side of the executioners » is strikingly similar to another central work of « history from the bottom-up »¹⁰⁹. In his famous *The Making of the British Working Class*, Edward P. Thompson declared he sought « to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, (...), the utopian artisan (...) from the enormous condescension of posterity »¹¹⁰. The now famous first chapter of *A People's History* is strikingly similar :
- Thus, in that inevitable taking of sides which comes from selection and emphasis in history, I prefer to try to tell the story of the discovery of America from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees, (...) of the Spanish-American War as seen by the Cubans, (...) the first World War as seen by the Socialists, the Second World War as seen by the pacifists, the New Deal as seen by the blacks in Harlem (...) ¹¹¹.
- 35 Thompson was a central influence among the new social historians in the 1960s¹¹². Such a direct influence illustrates generational continuity. Indeed, Thompson belongs to the same generation as Zinn : born in England in 1924, his radical views were informed by Stalinism, fascism and WWII (during which he served in the British army)¹¹³. A member of the British Communist Party in his youth, he broke away from Stalinism in 1956. From then on, he would seek to recapture a humanist approach to Marxism through his writings and political activism¹¹⁴. One of the early founders of the New Left in Britain, he would come to influence a new generation of activists and scholars in the United States. The new social history of the 1960s was dramatically transformed by his work. Published in 1963, *The Making* participated in deep historiographical changes and served as a major contribution to social theory¹¹⁵. Thompson's intellectual role for the New Left in Britain and in the US is another illustration of continuity among generations of radicals¹¹⁶.
- 36 To conclude, three decades after Zinn's rise to prominence as a scholar-activist of « history from the bottom-up », his generational identity has taken on a new meaning. This is not only because he outlived some of the major historians of his time, but because historical circumstances have given new meaning to his generational identity¹¹⁷. Indeed, Zinn has revisited his life and work in light of the « global justice » and antiwar movements of the 21st century. In turn, he has served as a touchstone for the emergence of a new audience for radicalism, or perhaps even the emergence of a new generation of

social activists. Zinn has emphasized how his philosophy of history came out of his personal experience, as he claimed that acknowledgement of biases is better than false objectivity. It is precisely this sense of continuity among periods of resistance, so explicit in his personal life, from the Great Depression and World War Two, to the Cold War and the major turning points of the Sixties, which has driven Zinn to national prominence as a public intellectual. But this biographical fact would be nothing without the scholarly commitment to retrieve a sense of continuity among periods, hence generations, of popular movements. This intellectual commitment, also a political one, lies at the core of Zinn's controversial status and popularity today, at a time when a deep national and ideological crisis has opened up new challenges for proponents of social justice.

NOTES

1. A contribution to the colloquium entitled « L'Amérique militante aujourd'hui » organized by LERMA at the University of Provence in March 2005. I wish to thank Naomi Wulf for her help and the useful advice she gave me to write a revised version of this article. I am also indebted to French labor historian Marianne Debouzy for having raised the question of Zinn's surprising popularity in spite of his age during the conference. Also, French historian Pap N'Diaye has given me useful advice on the issue of defining intellectual generations in the US left. I also wish to thank my research advisor Serge Ricard for his support.
2. First published in 1980, it has been repeatedly updated by Zinn. Sales of the book have increased progressively each year. James Green, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, « Howard Zinn's History » (May 23, 2003), B.13-4.
3. Howard Zinn, interview with Ambre Ivol, audio recording, Boston University, September 24, 2003.
4. Gus Van Sant, *Good Will Hunting*, New York, Miramax, 1997.
5. Howard Zinn Collection, *A People's History Correspondence, 1980-2003* [files not indexed], Boston University. Some of Zinn's files are still in the process of being indexed. They can be found at Boston University in both the Gotlieb Research Center and in Zinn's personal office which he holds as Professor Emeritus in the Political Science department. The Gotlieb Center essentially holds video and audio recordings from 1974 to 2005. Personal material in the BU office includes reel-to-reel recordings of the southern Civil Rights movement, syllabi and student files, as well as Zinn's personal correspondence. The author of this paper has been asked by Howard Zinn to index the material. Judging from Zinn's correspondence, it seems that many students have become acquainted with Zinn's book in high school. Also, while teaching at Boston College in 2006-2007, the author noticed that graduate students and faculty members in the history, sociology and African Diaspora departments all knew of Howard Zinn's work. At Boston University, Zinn is still a celebrity.
6. Pierre Dommergues coined the French expression of « contre-manuel d'histoire » in his review of *A People's History*. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, « Une Histoire du peuple des Etats-Unis » (avril 1980), 8-9. Frances Fitzgerald, *America Revised* (Boston : Atlantic-Little,

- Brown, 1979). A comparison between Zinn and Fitzgerald can be found in *The Newton Teachers' Quarterly*, « Worth Reading? » (Winter 1980), 4.
7. Paul Buhle & John McMillian, ed., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 2003), 5.
 8. Buhle & McMillian, *The New Left Revisited*, 5.
 9. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream : The « Objectivity Question » and the American Historical Profession*, 11th edition (1988 ; Cambridge University Press, 1999), 440. For a discussion on the « new social history », see 440-45.
 10. Pap N'Diaye, *Genèse* 55 (June 2004), 170 and Michael Kazin, « Howard Zinn's History Lessons », *Dissent Magazine* (Spring 2004). <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=385>.
 11. Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
 12. « Radical Caucus in the American Historical Association (AHA), 1969-1974 », *Staughton Lynd Personal Papers (1940-1977)*, Wisconsin State Historical Society.
 13. Lemisch coined the phrase « history from the bottom up », Radical Historians Organization (MARHO), editors, *Visions of History* (1976 ; New York : Pantheon Books, 6th edition, 1983), 164. Jesse Lemisch, *On Active Duty in War and Peace : Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession* (Toronto : New Hogtown Press, 1975). Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1968) ; « Reflections on Radical History », *Radical History Review* 79 (2001), 104-08.
 14. Lori Stokes, « Kosovo Crisis », MSNBC (March 4, 1999), « Iraq and WMDs », MSNBC (July 13, 2003). Howard Zinn Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Center, Boston University.
 15. Speaking of the movements challenging globalization which emerged from various countries, sociologist Charles Derber states that « antiglobalization » is an inadequate term to describe « dissenting forces » speaking « passionately for global justice ». « The global justice movements captured the attention of Americans in the raucous 1999 battle of Seattle ». Derber, *People Before Profit : The New Globalization in an Age of Terror, Big Money and Economic Crisis* (New York : Picador, 2003), 4.
 16. The concept of « war on terrorism » is defined by Howard Zinn in interviews with Anthony Arnove, *Terrorism and War* (New York : Seven Stories Press, 2002), 28.
 17. The author has attended many public speeches by Zinn in the Boston area over the course of the last four years, especially during the last two years which she spent as an exchange student and a part-time lecturer at Boston College.
 18. Paul Buhle, Mari Jo Buhle & Dan Georgakas, *The Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 2nd ed. (1990 ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1998), 545-51.
 19. Maurice Isserman, *If I had a Hammer : the Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Urbana : University of Chicago, 1993). Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 418.
 20. Howard Zinn, interview with Ambre Ivöl, audio recording, Boston University, April 11, 2007. Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (1987 ; New York : Basic Books, 2000), 6-19.
 21. Michel Winock, « Les Générations intellectuelles », *Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire* 22 : 22 (1989), 17.
 22. Derber, *People Before Profit*, 1-21.
 23. Kenneth M. Jensen, ed., *A Look at the End of History ?* (Washington DC : US Institute for Peace, 1990) ; Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York : Simon & Shuster, 1996). Daniel Vernet, « 2001 : le 11-Septembre et la guerre de civilisation », *Le Monde* (August 25, 2007), 13.
 24. Information about the show can be found online at the *Democracy Now* homepage : <http://www.democracynow.org/about.shtml>.

25. Kate Holbrook, Ann S. Kim, Brian Palmer and Anna Portnoy, *Global Values 101* (Boston : Beacon Press, 2006), 107.
26. Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo : Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York : Picador USA, 2000).
27. *Global Values 101*, vii-ix.
28. Zinn, *The Progressive Magazine*, « A Flash of the Possible » (January 2000). http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/FlashofPossible_Zinn.html
29. The event was announced online at <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2000/0929-10.htm>
30. Borrel, *Not In Our Name*. See also the group's website at <http://www.nion.us/Published.htm>.
31. On February 15, 2003, more than 10 million people demonstrated against the war across the world. See for instance, Nyta Mann, « A New Era of Political Activism » and press releases at *BBOnline*, February 2, 2003, *BBOnline*, February 17, 2003 and *CNN.com*, January 19, 2003.
32. Deb Ellis and Dennis Mueller, ed., *You Can't Be Neutral on A Moving Train : A Documentary* (Brooklyn, New York : Icarius Films, Run First Features, 2004).
33. Radio shows include community radio stations such as *Democracy Now ! The War and Peace Report* and National Public Radio broadcasts. See especially Tom Ashbrook, *The Connection*, NPR, « Memorial Day », May 25, 2001, Tom Ashbrook, *On Point*, NPR, « People's Historian », August 1, 2004 and Tom Ashbrook, *On Point*, « Howard Zinn and the War of Terror », June 17, 2002.
34. Zinn, interview, Boston University, July 2004. Audio recording in the author's possession. Ellis and Mueller, *You Can't Be Neutral : a Documentary*.
35. Noam Chomsky, *Responsabilité des intellectuels*, transl. Frédéric Cotton (Marseille : Agone, 1998) ; Chomsky, *De la guerre comme politique étrangère des Etats-Unis*, transl. Frédéric Cotton (Marseille : Agone, 2004) ; Michael Albert, *Après le capitalisme, Eléments d'économie participaliste*, transl. Frédéric Cotton (Marseille : Agone, 2003). <http://atheles.org/agone/historique.html>
36. Howard Zinn, *Marx le retour : pièce historique en un acte*, translated by Thierry Discepolo (Marseille : Agone, 2002) ; Zinn, « Nous, le peuple des Etats-Unis ... » *Essais sur la liberté d'expression et l'anticommunisme, le gouvernement représentatif et la justice économique, les guerres justes, la violence et la nature humaine*, transl. Frédéric Cotton ; Zinn, *L'Impossible Neutralité : autobiographie d'un historien et militant* (Marseille : Agone, 2006). Zinn, *En suivant Emma*, transl. Julie David (Marseille : Agone, 2007). Zinn also traveled to Europe between 2003 and 2006 to discuss the issue of the war in Iraq.
37. Over 500 people attended the talk at the University of the Sorbonne Nouvelle (University of Paris III). The author of this paper organized and chaired the event. For references on the concept of « Just war », see Howard Zinn, interview with Anthony Arrove, *Terrorism and War*, 22-6 ; Howard Zinn, Anthony Arrove ed., *Howard Zinn on War* (New York : Seven Stories Press, 2001), 178 ; Michael Walzer, *Guerres Justes et Injustes* (Paris : Belin, 1999).
38. « La pensée unique » refers to orthodoxy in the field of history.
39. Daniel Mermet, « Une Histoire populaire des Etats-Unis », *Là-bas Si J'y Suis*, France Inter, December 10-11, 2003. The author served as translator during the recording session with Howard Zinn at Radio France in Paris.
40. Daniel Bensaid, Eustache Kouvelakis & Sebastian Budgen, ed., *L'Autre Amérique : les Américains contre l'état de guerre* (Paris : Textuel, 2002).

41. *Imperial Democracy & Come September : Two Talks by Arundhati Roy with Howard Zinn* (New York : DVD AK Press, 2004).
42. Thomas Sotinel, *Le Monde*, « Bruce Springsteen met en scène son opposition à George Bush », August 10, 2004. <http://www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3222,36-375027,0.html>. See also the website of the main group organizing the campaign at <http://www.moveon.org>
43. « Safe states » were where the voting history and polling rates indicated that either Republicans or Democrats were likely to win. Ted Glick, « Green Party Safe States Strategy », *Znet*, July 1st, 2003. <http://www.zmag.org/Sustainers/Content/2003-07/01glick.cfm>. Zinn, interview with Ambre Ivol, Boston University, July 2004. See also Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now, the War and Peace Report*, « Nader versus Anybody But Bush : A Debate on Ralph Nader's Candidacy », October 26, 2004, <http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=04/10/26/144233>
44. The main antiwar coalition *United for Peace and Justice* organized the march on August 31, 2005. <http://www.unitedforpeace.org>
45. Pictures of the demonstration are in possession of the author, who attended the event.
46. Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now ! The War and Peace Report*, « In Rare Joint Interview : Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn on Iraq, Vietnam, Activism and History », April 16, 2007.
47. <http://www.historiansagainstwar.org>
48. Novick, *Noble Dream*, 434-35. The AHA passed an antiwar resolution a few years later. Controversies about Zinn's work have often focused on the issue of objectivity in history. Because of this, Zinn's radicalism has not always been welcomed by self-described leftist historians. Historian and *Dissent* editor Michael Kazin wrote a scathing critique of Zinn's *People's History* in the spring of 2004, denouncing the narrowness of Zinn's point of view as a radical historian who belittles other historians' perspectives. Kazin, « Howard Zinn's History Lessons », <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/?article=385>
49. « Historians in the News : AHA Elections : Historians vote to condemn War in Iraq », *History News Network*, March 3rd, 2007. The 2008 convention of Historians Against the War in Atlanta reinforces this trend. Naomi Klein will be one of the keynote speakers, and roundtable discussions include the history of antiwar movements in the US, the issue of academic freedom and a specific panel on the life and work of Howard Zinn. The author will be presenting a paper there. For a full list of the topics, one can visit the website at <http://www.historiansagainstwar.org/hawconf/sessions.html>
50. Marvin Gettelman, « A Town Meeting with Howard Zinn ». See the *History News Network* website and the following link : <http://hnn.us/articles/4353.html#zinn>. Boston University also honored Zinn's work in a National Public Radio broadcast aired from campus : « Howard Zinn on Democracy and War », *Boston University World of Ideas*, November 19, 2006. The recording is in the author's possession.
51. <http://www.historians.org/Perspectives/issues/2005/0509/0509ann4.cfm>
52. Novick, *Noble Dream*, 430, 458. Lynd interview in MARHO, ed. *Visions of History*, 149.
53. John McMillian & Paul Buhle, ed., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 2003) and John McMillian & Timothy Patrick McCarthy, ed., *A Radical Reader : A Documentary History of the American Radical Tradition* (New York : The New Press, 2003). American scholars have recently sought to popularize radical history. Paul Buhle has initiated several graphic novel projects in radical history. One of them is a graphic novel version of *A People's History*. The author has participated in the early stages of the

project in 2004, with Paul Buhle, artist Mike Konopacki and graduate history student Giuliana Chamedes. The book will be published in 2008. Paul Buhle, email correspondence with Ambre Ivol, January 31, 2008.

54. Zinn, *Artists in Times of War* (Boston : Seven Stories Press, 2003) and *Terrorism and War*.

55. Zinn, *Voices of A People's History of the United States* (New York : Seven Stories Press, 2004), 23.

56. *Lord of the Rings* movie star Viggo Mortensen appeared on a television broadcast with a copy of Zinn's *Voices*, which he recommended as an important resource to understand US history. *Charlie Rose Show*, December 3, 2002. <http://www.brego.net/viggo/viggo-politics.php>

57. Mother of Casey Sheehan, a soldier who died in Iraq in April 2004, Cindy Sheehan has become one of the leading voices of the antiwar movement, representing military families opposed to the war. She made national headlines when she camped outside President Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas in August 2005. Cindy Sheehan, *Peace Mom : A Mother's Journey Through Heartache to Activism* (New York : Atria, 2006). Philippe Borrel, ed., *Not In Our Name*, Issy-les-moulineaux, Arte France, Dissidents, 2006.

58. The author has attended two readings from *Voices* in 2006 and 2007 at Cooper Union in New York City in April 2006 and May 2007. See also Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now ! The War and Peace Report*, « Readings from *Voices of A People's History*, December 26, 2005. <http://www.democracynow.org>. Moreover, in January 2008, a television miniseries project of *A People's History* has taken form. Andrea Shea, *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, January 22, 2008. Sue Katz, « Dramatic Voices of Dissent : Celebrities Film Zinn's *The People Speak* », *Alternet*, January 26, 2008. <http://www.alternet.org>. Anthony Arnone, correspondence with Ambre Ivol, January 26, 2008.

59. Zinn, interview with Ambre Ivol, September 24, 2003.

60. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on A Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times* (1994 ; Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

61. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on A Moving Train*, 87.

62. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral on A Moving Train*, 139.

63. See for instance the striking difference in tone between British historian Eric Hobsbawm's autobiography, *Interesting Times : A Twentieth Century Life* (New York : Pantheon Books, 2002) and Zinn's memoir. The titles themselves speak to this difference in the way they look back on their lives. They are generationally connected (Hobsbawm was born in 1917 and lived first in Berlin then in Britain), politically similar in that Communism appealed to them both (though Hobsbawm has explicitly remained a Communist), and of Jewish families during the traumatic times of European Fascism. Given all this, Zinn spends little time discussing his youth in a New York Jewish working class family, compared to the attention devoted to the 1960s and the black liberation movement.

64. Davis D. Joyce, *Howard Zinn, A Radical American Vision* (New York : Prometheus Books, 2003), 52. *The Future of History*, 35-6. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 26.

65. Social Science Club, « Liberty at Spelman », March 11, 1963, reel-to-reel tape recording, Howard Zinn Files, Boston University. For details about the state of Zinn's archives, see note 5. Joyce, *Howard Zinn*, 56.

66. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 69-84.

67. Zinn, *SNCC : The New Abolitionists* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1964) and *The Southern Mystique* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

68. Zinn, *SNCC*, 4.

69. A southern-based research organization founded in 1919 and dedicated to the improvement of race relations in the United States.
70. Zinn saw the South as the « essence of the nation ». Indeed, « those very qualities long attributed to the South are American qualities and the nation reacts emotionally to the South precisely because it subconsciously recognizes itself there ». Zinn, *Southern Mystique*, 217.
71. This hints at how connections between social movements developed, as other movements sprang from the black liberation movement. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics : the Roots of the Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York : Vintage Books, 1980).
72. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 103.
73. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 115-125. See also Zinn's files at Boston University. The author is in the process of indexing and studying these primary sources. For a first-hand testimony of new left activism in Cambridge Mass., see Michal Albert, *Remembering Tomorrow : From SDS to Life after Capitalism, A Memoir* (New York : Seven Stories Press, 2006).
74. These experiences would later serve as primary sources for his chapter on the Vietnam War in *A People's History*, 469-501. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States from 1492 to the Present* (1980 ; New York, Longman, 3rd. ed. 1996).
75. Howard Zinn, *Vietnam, The Logic of Withdrawal* (Boston : Beacon press, 1967). It was first published as articles in *The Nation* in January 1966 and February 1967 under the respective titles of « Vietnam : Means and Ends » and « Vietnam : The Logic of Withdrawal ».
76. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 110-14 ; 126-38. Wes Lawrence, « A Plea for Withdrawal », *The Plain Dealer*, March 21, 1967. Peter Kneaskern, « Letter to 535 Congressmen », May 10, 1967. Copies are in the author's possession.
77. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 87-102 ; 131.
78. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 87-102.
79. Ulysse Botton, ed., *Royan, ville martyre* (Royan : imprimerie Botton frères, 1966).
80. *The Future of History*, David Barsamian, *Interviews with Howard Zinn* (Monroe : Common Courage Press, 1999), 22-3. Howard Zinn, *The Politics of History* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1970) and *Postwar America : 1945-1971* (New York : Bobs Merrill Company, 1973). He would also come to study the atomic bomb and would publish an article entitled « A Mess of Death and Documents » in 1962 while a Fellow in East-Asian Studies at Harvard University. André Shiffrein, ed., *The Cold War and the University : Toward an Intellectual History of the Postwar Years* (New York : New Press, 1997), 69-71 ; Zinn, *Hiroshima : Breaking the Silence* (Westfield, NJ : Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1995).
81. *The Future of History*, 4.
82. Military families were also present and had constituted a group called Military Families Against the War. The author has audio recordings and pictures of the event.
83. Opposition among soldiers has grown dramatically since then. Buddhika Jayamaha et al., « Nous, soldats américains en Irak », *Le Monde*, August 28, 2007, 17.
84. Zinn, « The Greatest Generation? », *The Progressive*, October 2001. http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Zinn/Greatest_Generation.html
85. Zinn, « Dissent at the War Memorial », *The Progressive*, August 2004. <http://www.progressive.org/august04/zinn0804.html>
86. Studs Terkel, *The 'Good War' : an Oral History of World War Two* (New York : New Press, 1984). Commenting on his choice of title, Terkel notes, « Quotation marks have been added, not as a matter of caprice or editorial comment, but simply because the adjective 'good' mated with the noun 'war' is so incongruous » (No page number).

87. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 170-78. Zinn, interview with Ambre Ivol, September 24, 2007.
88. Schiffrin, *Cold War and University*, xvi-xvii.
89. Terkel, 'Good War', 217 ; 277-82 ; 333-37 ; 343-49 ; 364-65.
90. William Palmer, *Engagement with the Past : The Lives and Works of the World War Two Generation of Historians* (Lexington : University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 151. Taylor Branch, « Justice for Warriors », *New York Review of Books* (April 12, 2007), 40-43. Himself a veteran, William Appleman Williams remembers how he chose to study history because of the trauma of war and a desire to understand the new atomic age. « *It was history because I really did want to try and make some sense out of what the hell was going on—the bomb and all that* ». Interview with William Appleman Williams in Radical Historians Organization (MARHO), ed.n *Visions of History* (1976 ; New York : Pantheon Books, 6th edition, 1983), 129.
91. Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes : McCarthyism in America* (New York : Little, Brown, 1998), 359-415.
92. Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (New York : Basic Books, 1977).
93. Zinn, interview, Boston University, April 11, 2007. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 178.
94. Howard Zinn's F.B.I. file, Personal Papers, Boston University. The material has yet to be indexed. Copies of the files are in the author's possession.
95. Zinn, *You Can't Be Neutral*, 178.
96. « Gung Ho » was a « Chinese Communist cheer » according to Zinn. Zinn, interview, Boston University, April 11, 2007.
97. Zinn's F.B.I. file, Personal Papers, Boston University. See note 5 and 94.
98. In particular, he was influenced by civil libertarian Henry Steele Commager.
99. Schiffrin, ed., *The Cold War and the University*, 37-8.
100. In the 1950s, the word « negro » was not necessarily derogatory. While acknowledging the ideological underpinnings of the term, this author chose to keep the original quotation. For a study of African American historiography, see Pap N'Diaye in Jean Heffer & François Weil, ed., *Chantiers d'histoire américaine* (Paris : Belin, 1994), 273-307. Zinn in Schiffrin, ed., *The Cold War and the University*, 52.
101. Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Liberation Movement : A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill : North Carolina Press, 2003).
102. Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 404-15. Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is A Country : Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 2004).
103. Quoted in Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 148.
104. Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour : a Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York : Henry Holt, 2006). Zinn already held this view in 1980, as he wrote *A People's History*. The chapter he devoted to the Civil Rights movement and entitled « *Or Does it Explode?* » matches the recent scholarly revision of the dynamics and chronology of the Black liberation movement, as he starts with the 1930s and ends in the early 1970s. Quoting poetry and novels from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, Zinn argues that although social movements always « come as a surprise », awareness of oppression has long been present, though contained. In his study of social movements, Zinn became more attuned to continuity among generations of political activists.
105. Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 91. Similarly, the autobiography of David Dellinger, a conscientious objector during World War Two, who became a leading national organizer of the movement against the war in Vietnam also illustrates these connections between the 1960s and former generations of activists. David Dellinger, *From Yale to Jail : the Life Story of a Moral Dissenter* (New York : Pantheon Books, 1996).

106. Zinn, *People's History*, 11.
 107. Zinn, *People's History*, 289.
 108. Zinn, *People's History*, 689-708. The author is still in the process of studying the bibliography from a generational perspective.
 109. Zinn, *People's History*, 10.
 110. Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London : Gollancz, 1964), 12-3. Zinn's copy of the book is in the author's possession. Its first chapter in particular is extensively annotated by Zinn. Though not mentioned in the bibliography of *A People's History*, this was certainly an influence on Zinn's thinking.
 111. Zinn, *People's History*, 10.
 112. Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 440.
 113. Edward Palmer Thompson (1924-1993).
 114. MARHO, *Visions of History*, 5-25.
 115. Kaye Harvey, *The British Marxist Historians : an Introductory Analysis* (New York : Polity Press, 1984), 173-176.
 116. Buhle et al., *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 545.
 117. Palmer, *Engagement With the Past*, ix-xvii.
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